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Talent Being Wasted

The director of the Central Intelligence Agency, with the stroke of a pen, created three categories of second-class citizens. Adm. Stansfield Turner issued an order barring the agency from hiring military retirees, and civil service and foreign service retirees.

It is a classic example of a man cutting off his nose to spite his face, but more than an individual is involved: national security is at stake.

Behind Turner's move is the issue of "double-dipping" — that's the derogatory expression for the practice of retired military personnel in drawing pensions and a salary from a government agency. President Carter has spoken against the double-dippers, and the CIA director obviously is making points with his boss.

Turner's action against military retirees could be the harbinger of similar moves by other agencies. Any agency not under civil service could ban retirees, but departments and agencies under civil service would need legislation to bar such hiring. The FBI and the Defense Intelligence Agency, for example, could hang out a sign: No military,

civil service or foreign service retirees need apply!

It should be remembered that the CIA is — or should be — a spy organization, keeping tabs on the activities of U.S. enemies all around the world. A person who has had long years of military or foreign service, and who has participated in intelligence gathering operations, is particularly suited for CIA-type work. Many of these retirees are fluent in several languages, and many have developed valuable specialties during their initial careers.

What the matter boils down to is that the CIA, the FBI, DIA and all others involved in national security and intelligence should hire the best men and women available. That is in the national interest.

A major general said, "Admiral Turner has deprived himself of an awful lot of talent." And a senior colonel said, "It is not exactly the American way to deny jobs to men and women just because they have served their country . . ."

A court test of whether Turner has abridged the civil rights of these retirees should not be long in coming.